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DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

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SUBJECT: NCP "AFRAID OF ITSELF" IN JEM INCURSION INTRIGUE

¶1. (SBU) The day of the JEM attack on Omdurman May 10, on the margins of party discussions in preparation for the second SPLM General Conference, CDA Fernandez caught up with party leaders to discuss fears and intrigue in Khartoum caused by reports of the (then rumored) attack by the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) led by Darfur rebel Khalil Ibrahim and related issues.

¶2. (SBU) The SPLM were highly amused by the NCP's unusual discomfort at the thought of a JEM attack deep inside Sudan. FM Deng Alor told CDA that what really concerns the NCP is not so much Khalil but "the enemy within. They are afraid of themselves" and worry that Ibrahim could have allies inside Khartoum from the large Darfuri community in the capital, the tight-knit network of Zaghawa merchants and traders in Omdurman who are part of the livestock trade, or even worse, among the NCP and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). "There are factions within the NCP and SAF who may still have a relationship with JEM," he noted "and the NCP leadership fears that Khalil would not have attempted this without a fifth column."

¶3. (SBU) Alor noted that FVP Salva Kiir had been called by VP Ali Osman Taha early on the morning of May 10 to come to Khartoum "to take over defense of the area" as acting President in the absence of President Al-Bashir who is on an unannounced visit to Saudi Arabia (due to return later on May 10). Taha had also requested that a joint SPLA-SAF Joint Integrated Unit (JIU) should be used in a possible defense of the capital. Incredibly, he added that the SPLA might want to move their more mobile units north from Unity and Upper Nile states to assist in the defense. Jonglei State Governor Kuol Manyang, a daring former SPLA commander, laughed that the SPLA should move into Kosti in White Nile state (a traditional military marshalling area for invading the South) in preparation for "helping our brothers in the North."

¶4. (SBU) SPLM Abyei rep Edward Lino gleefully chimed in expecting that the NCP's former patron Dr. Hassan al-Turabi could be arrested at any time (Al-Turabi - who was in fact arrested May 12 as reported septel - has claimed for several years now to have no relations with his erstwhile protege, Khalil Ibrahim). Alor retorted "he may be arrested, or he could be the one arresting them!" The consensus of these seasoned adversaries of the NCP was that nothing scares the usually disciplined NCP as much as internal division and infighting and that, even if this threat is exaggerated or blunted, there is a certain level of dissatisfaction within the region who feel that the NCP is either too corrupt, too Islamist or not Islamist enough, too soft towards the Americans or too tough on the Darfuris and that Al-Bashir is allowing Sudan and the regime to slowly drift towards the abyss. The SPLMers, who admitted to being in contact with Chadian President Deby, claimed that the Chadians are indeed helping Ibrahim but "this is not a foreign invasion, these are Sudanese."

¶5. (SBU) Eventually changing the subject after much laughter at the NCP's expense, Alor said that the NCP had still made another interim solution proposal for the disputed region of Abyei which excluded Meiram, Nyama and Heglig. While the SPLM is willing to exclude the

all-Arab area of Meiram, they want the two other areas for the South and the latest proposal will be rejected. Kiir himself has decided that if Abyei is not solved in the next round of US-Sudanese talks to the SPLM's satisfaction, they will have nothing more to do with this initiative to improve relations between the U.S. and NCP. CDA Fernandez responded that the USG sees fulfillment of the CPA, especially the Abyei Protocol, as an essential element of a possible improvement in Sudanese-American relations. The exclusion of oil-rich Heglig was a deal-breaker for the SPLM in earlier discussions.

¶6. (SBU) In an earlier meeting with acting CG Tariot, SPLA Deputy Chief of Staff BG Salva Mathok thought that JEM could not successfully threaten the capital "unless they have support from the inside." Mathok, a former SAF officer who maintains ties with recently purged officers from the Northern military, described the potential JEM threat as a case of chickens coming home to roost. He thought Al-Turabi will be arrested within the coming days (which turned out to be correct - but after the JEM attack) as a precautionary measure. Mathok emphasized that SAF is becoming increasingly factionalized, not along tribal lines but along political factional divisions. "There is a feeling by some that Al-Bashir is not doing enough to preserve the regime's status and that others could better represent their interests."

¶7. (SBU) Mathok said that as a precaution, the SPLA had placed its forces on stand-by alert along the South Darfur and South Kordofan borders. GOSS President Kiir directed the action, noting to Mathok that while the SAF must fight their own problems alone "we need to be prepared in case JEM is chased southward." Mathok emphasized that currently the SPLA intended to remain neutral but anyone who vanquished the NCP must also recognize "SPLA superiority." He added

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that the JEM force was too small to account for the unease evinced publicly by Khartoum.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: The SPLM's glee at the NCP's fears was a welcome respite to the usual concern about a monolithic North seeking to crush the plucky but outnumbered South. Alor and company were absolutely right that Ibrahim's Zaghawa raiders alone could not really threaten the regime, and ultimately the JEM incursion was defeated quickly. However, this attack led by the cagey Islamist (and former NIF hardliner) Khalil Ibrahim, combined with former NIF founder Hassan al Turabi, and possibly joined by disaffected members of the regime - if they really exist - is a clear danger to the NCP and the arrest of Turabi May 12 proves this point (septel). Whether a paranoid Khartoum is actually in danger over the longer term remains to be seen - Embassy Khartoum will offer its analysis of the regime's options and likely response over the coming days. Meanwhile the SPLM will watch and wait, for once feeling relatively safe in its southern redoubt.

FERNANDEZ